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SUBJECT: EAP DAS Eric John's Meeting with Assistant Foreign Minister Nguyen Duc Hung

11. (SBU) Summary: EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary Eric John, the Ambassador and EAP/MLS Director Scot Marciel discussed bilateral relations and regional cooperation with Assistant Foreign Minister Nguyen Duc Hung on September 27. After praising the momentum and goodwill that the Vietnamese Prime Minister's recent visit had created, Hung urged the United States to move quickly to conclude bilateral negotiations for Vietnam's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). Hung also expressed satisfaction at the progress made in recent Six Party Talks with North Korea, and noted China's positive participation in them. He pledged the Government of Vietnam's (GVN) commitment to quickly approving the location for the new U.S. Embassy and to continuing to cooperate on humanitarian, religious freedom and counter trafficking issues. End Summary.

#### REGIONAL ISSUES AND THE SIX-PARTY TALKS

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12. (SBU) EAP Deputy Assistant Secretary Eric John, the Ambassador and EAP/MLS Director Scot Marciel met with Assistant Foreign Minister Nguyen Duc Hung on September 27, the first in a series of meetings on the U.S.-Vietnam bilateral relationship and cooperation on regional issues. In response to Hung's opening question regarding U.S. priorities in the region, DAS John outlined the importance of bilateral relationships with countries like Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia, as well as that of multilateral efforts, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the Six Party Talks with North Korea, and APEC. Hung expressed Vietnam's satisfaction over the agreed statement of principles that came out of the most recent round of Six Party Talks, noting that Vietnam was pleased to see China's cooperation in the talks.

#### APEC

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13. (SBU) AFM Hung also wanted to know if it was true that South Korea planned to invite North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il to the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Meeting in November 2005. DAS John said it was unlikely, and that all invitations to an event like the Leaders' Meeting must follow APEC protocol. DAS John then pointed out that there was some concern in Washington that the APEC 2006 schedule for Hanoi had not been made available to participating countries. The "time seems to have arrived for this to be clear," DAS John added. He also noted that the U.S. Senior Official for APEC and EAP/FO Economic Coordinator Mike Michalak would be visiting Hanoi in early October to further discuss APEC 2006 with Vietnamese officials.

#### ASEAN

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14. (SBU) AFM Hung asked what role the United States saw for Vietnam in ASEAN, to which DAS John replied that the United States would appreciate Vietnam's help in moving the ASEAN agenda forward to more substantive issues. He also asked that Vietnam push for greater attention to human rights concerns, especially in Burma. If the United States and Vietnam could have a consistent message on the importance of Burma's meeting its democratic commitments, made many years ago, that would be very helpful. DAS John also noted that the United States would welcome Vietnam's insights as preparations unfold for the East Asia Summit (EAS) to be held this December. In response to Hung's question about U.S. participation, DAS John replied that the United States would review the progress of the EAS, particularly with regard to the substantive goals of the group, before making any decisions.

#### THE POSITIVE IMPACT OF THE PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT

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15. (SBU) Turning to the subject of Prime Minister Phan Van Khai's June 2005 visit to the United States, AFM Hung noted how big an impact the visit had had on Vietnamese public

opinion, dramatically increasing the people's understanding of and support for the United States, a fact evidenced by their generous contributions to assist victims of Hurricane Katrina. This attitude had continued to grow throughout the country, and within the Central Government, there was renewed momentum for U.S.-Vietnam cooperation. Specifically, Hung named bilateral counternarcotics efforts as an example of this cooperation, noting that Vietnam would extend the agreement under which it operates. He also listed bilateral health projects on avian influenza and HIV/AIDS as further examples of a strong U.S.-Vietnam partnership. Referring to the mini-Chiefs of Missions (COM) conference that concluded yesterday here in Hanoi attended by the U.S. Ambassadors to Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam and the Consul General in Ho Chi Minh City, Hung brought up the importance of increasing humanitarian cooperation in the region. He singled out the mutual resolve of both U.S. and Vietnamese officials to look for opportunities for more regional humanitarian efforts, to further enhance our POW/MIA fullest possible accounting work.

#### WTO ACCESSION

16. (SBU) AFM Hung then moved to the question of Vietnam's World Trade Organization (WTO) accession, adding that this was the Prime Minister's and Deputy Prime Minister Vu Khoan's only real bilateral issue of concern. Hung then asked what the real reason was for the delay in U.S.-Vietnam WTO negotiations, noting that Vietnam's leaders could not understand why nor explain what could be taking so long. Hung wondered if there was any political motivation in the United States working against Vietnam's accession. DAS John assured Hung that there were no political forces working against Vietnam's accession. In fact, he said, the United States took Vietnam's accession very seriously and was working very hard to come to a resolution as soon as possible. Vietnam, however, must likewise work hard to address the problems that remained, especially since accession would ultimately benefit the Vietnamese people most of all. If the Vietnamese could speed up their pace, and put a more serious offer on the table, he said, "we will get there."

#### TRAFFICKING, RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND HUMAN RIGHTS

17. (SBU) DAS John raised the importance of combating the trafficking of drugs and people in Vietnam, expressing a hope that cooperation from Vietnamese law enforcement on these issues would improve. AFM Hung observed that this cooperation seemed to be on the right path. After expressing his appreciation that Vietnam had been taken off the Majors' List for drug trafficking, Hung then noted his disappointment that Vietnam was still listed as a Country of Particular Concern for religious freedom, adding that Vietnam had made real progress in this area. For example, the new decree on religious freedom (which clearly prohibits forced renunciations of faith) had been disseminated to all authorities and had clarified their roles in the community. In response, DAS John commended Vietnam's laws protecting religious freedom, but noted that the problem for the United States was not with the laws but with their implementation, especially in the Northwest and Central Highlands. Many members of the U.S. Congress were particularly interested in this subject. DAS John also reiterated the U.S. intent to resume the results-based Human Rights Dialogue with Vietnam as soon as a U.S. Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor was in place.

#### A NEW U.S. EMBASSY

18. (SBU) DAS John raised the issue of the new Embassy property, stressing how critical the timing of Vietnam's approval for the new location was to the USG budget cycle. The fiscal year was about to end, and formal approval for the new building and its location would help to anchor the development of the bilateral relationship. Hung replied that all of the ministries had approved the proposal, and the only remaining hurdle was to obtain the Prime Minister's signature, something Hung believed they would receive by the end of the week. He warned that a signing ceremony might take a few more days to arrange, however.

19. (SBU) DAS John cleared this cable.

#### MARINE